CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 8 June 2000, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Jean Lint (Belgium)

GE.00-61750 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 850th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, as you know, a memorial service was held today in Tokyo for the late Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Kaiso Obuchi, and was attended by a large number of heads of State and Government. The late Prime Minister fell ill on 1 April 2000 and died on 14 May 2000. In his capacity first as Foreign Minister and then as Prime Minister, he made a major contribution to world peace as well as to the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation. On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, I wish to express our sincere condolences to his family and to the Japanese people.

I now call on my colleague, the distinguished Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. NORBORU (Japan): On behalf of the Government of Japan, I should like to convey our deep appreciation for the kind words of condolence just expressed by the President today, the day of the official funeral service for our late Prime Minister. Such sympathy is much needed for his bereaved family as well as for the Japanese people at this time of national mourning. His sudden illness and death were especially sad for me because I had worked as his foreign policy adviser in the Prime Minister's Office until my appointment as Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in January 2000. His last message to me, the day before my departure from Tokyo, was that I should make the utmost efforts to advance disarmament, including an endeavour to ensure the successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference. I am positive that he would have been satisfied with recent developments. Mr. President, I thank you again for your very kind words, and I will convey them to my Government as well as to the family of the late Prime Minister Obuchi.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank my colleague the Ambassador of Japan for his statement.

As this is the beginning of Belgium's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to make a few remarks as President.

First of all I would like to thank my predecessors this year in the President's chair, Ambassadors Kreid, Chowdray and Martinez, who all worked towards the same elusive goal of defining a balanced programme of work that is acceptable to all. Now it is my turn to take up the challenge and bring this task to a successful conclusion. I can assure you that I will spare no effort to achieve this and, at the outset, I would like to thank the many delegations which have assured me of their support.

The time has come for urgent action and for transparency. I doubt whether the international community will accept that, for the second year in a row, an institution with such competence and talent can fail to reach agreement on a programme which would in fact only commit it to doing its job. Part of this job consists in defining the criteria to be followed in

(The President)

seeking appropriate solutions to one of the major concerns of mankind: disarmament, an ideal enshrined in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, which states "We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

In this area, however, where idealism is rapidly giving way to the realism of security concerns, my country places its trust in the existing structures and recognizes that the Conference on Disarmament is the only forum where these problems can at least be negotiated, if not resolved.

We hope that all the members of the Conference on Disarmament will make a constructive contribution during this session, where every effort shall have to be made to attain the modest goals which we have set ourselves, such as the launching of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for military purposes and the elaboration of mandates to deal in an appropriate manner with nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Aside from the role that Belgium intends to play in the Conference, it has also been working to ensure the universality and full implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Here we welcome the fact that, at the last meeting of the States parties, 10 new States acceded to that international instrument and we call on other States to follow their example.

With regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, my country hopes that the Ad Hoc Group set up to draft a verification protocol will fairly soon - if possible before the Convention's Review Conference in 2001 - conclude its work.

Belgium also aims to combat the proliferation of light weapons and small arms. In this context, Belgium calls upon States to cooperate in a constructive spirit in preparing the Conference, scheduled for 2001, on the illicit traffic in those weapons.

Let me also recall the importance which we attach to the problem of anti-personnel mines. Belgium was the first country in the world to introduce legislation banning anti-personnel mines. It actively participated in the elaboration of the Ottawa Convention and is now working on implementation of the Treaty and promoting its universality. We hope that the second meeting of States parties, to be held in Geneva in September 2000, will have a successful outcome.

The last Belgian presidency was in 1992. At that time my colleague, the late Ambassador Servais, who was my first guide in matters of disarmament, welcomed the conclusion of work to negotiate the Convention on Chemical Weapons and asked the Ambassador of Romania to report on the activities during that year of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, which he had chaired. Then, as today, Brazil had sat to the left of Belgium and the Ambassador of Brazil at that time was our friend

(The President)

Ambassador Amorim. I hope that in 2011, at the next Belgian presidency, my then colleague will be able to say that, in 2000, the Conference on Disarmament had reached agreement on a programme of work after a long period of paralysis. That is my cherished hope.

For today, I have no speakers on my list. Is there any delegation wishing to take the floor at this stage?

If not, I would like to introduce a new practice. Here I shall be working without any notes, following a method which, I believe, one of my colleagues has already attempted in the past, with a view to bringing greater transparency to the work and consultations conducted by the President.

I have now been in this chair for three days and I regret that I have not as yet been able to speak to each and every one of you. I have, however, been able to report to the members of my regional group as well as the coordinators of regional groups on the consultations which I have launched. Working together with certain friends, whom I thank here, we have been preparing what I believe is our key task at this stage of the year, namely, a programme of work which includes the elements deemed by most member countries as priority issues. In my more formal statement, I said that the time had come for urgent action and that we cannot allow a second year to go by without breaking the deadlock.

In this programme of work, I have incorporated three elements familiar to us all. The first relates to fissile material. Here, for a long time, we have had a text that is accepted by all and so far I have not heard any delegation say that it was not ready to negotiate this text. I have been told by delegations that they wanted to tie this negotiation to other elements in the programme of work.

The second element in the programme is nuclear disarmament. This is a concern of most countries represented here. In the preparation of the text, I would like to pay tribute to my colleague from Algeria, Ambassador Dembri, who encouraged me to try and rework the text in a way that might satisfy all delegations, taking into account developments since my colleague prepared the original draft.

The third element is the prevention of an arms race in outer space, a major concern for a large number of delegations which must be taken on board. I can assure you that finding an acceptable compromise between the very divergent positions is no easy task, but, I urge all delegations involved in this issue to show a spirit of flexibility and compromise at this stage in the year. Without such spirit we will never find a solution.

I have circulated this draft text to a number of delegations and I am awaiting their response so that I can continue work. I will get back to you, time permitting but I hope that people will not tell me that they are waiting for instructions, in this day and age of e-mail and GSM, and we no longer have to send the diplomatic pouch by transatlantic steamer. If I get a prompt response, I hope to give you, in the course of next week, on either Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, a text that could then be submitted to the regional groups.

(The President)

Like my colleague from Belarus, I am happy to accept invitations from regional groups to present this draft programme to them. At the same time, I urge you not to slow down the work of the Conference with procedural arguments. In the draft text, I have endeavoured to respect the Conference's rules of procedure. One possibly sensitive point relating to procedure is rule 23 of our rules of procedure, which provides that the Conference may establish subsidiary bodies or groups and that these subsidiary groups could take the form of ad hoc subcommittees or working groups, or other forms. Nowhere in the rules of procedure does it say that an ad hoc committee is superior to a working group or that the task of an ad hoc committee is necessarily that of negotiating. I hope that this may be borne in mind and that no time is wasted on procedural matters of this nature.

I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Ambassador de Icaza.

Mr. DE ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to extend very warm congratulations to you on having assumed the presidency and at the same time to commend your predecessor on his efforts. My delegation naturally supports all that you are doing and we will be very pleased to consider the text that you say that you have been able to show some delegations. My delegation is not one of those. I cannot guarantee, Sir, that, when I am apprised of the text, I might not have to consult my authorities and might not need time for that purpose. For the sake of transparency, allow me to remind you that the programme of work is a single whole. It is difficult to work piecemeal on fragments that we do not know and, as I recall, in international law there is a prohibition on weapons with non-detectable fragments.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I can assure my colleague, the Ambassador of Mexico, that I shall exercise the greatest transparency and equality of treatment on all subjects. I now call upon the representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Akram.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, we are very happy with the new tradition of transparency which you are seeking to establish in the Conference. Transparency is always very useful and perhaps needs to be conditioned only by a sense of modesty. But I would like to say that my delegation, too, which happens at the moment to be the Coordinator of the Group of 21, has not seen your text. I would therefore seek further transparency from you, and to ascertain, if possible, which delegations, in your view, deserve the privilege of having received the text without the members of the Group of 21 having had the same privilege.

As you know, we are positively disposed, as a group, to the efforts you are making and we wish to remain positive, but I would add that transparency must be accompanied by equity and equality of treatment for all members of the Conference on Disarmament. This is a principle from which we will not deviate.

My second comment, Mr. President, I make not as the Coordinator of the Group of 21 but as the representative of Pakistan. You have spoken of three issues on which you are working and on which you will be drafting texts, and we look forward to seeing those. But we had also agreed in the past - I think it was two years ago - to establish another ad hoc committee. This

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

was the Ad Hoc Committee on Negative Security Assurances. May I presume that this will also be part of the programme of work? I would of course be grateful for a clarification from you as to your own intentions with regard to that issue. I also note that, in my understanding, there is no objection to establishing an ad hoc committee in this Conference with that mandate.

Finally, Mr. President, with regard to the rules of procedure, I think it is very clear that any mechanism that we establish in this Conference, which has a mandate as the sole negotiating body for multilateral disarmament, is a negotiating mechanism. We are not here for discussion and for debate. Any mechanism - no matter how its mandate may be worded - is part of this Conference. This Conference is a negotiating body and therefore any mechanism that is set up is a mechanism for negotiation. We, as a delegation, do not wish to accept any interpretation to the contrary and we will make that clear at the appropriate time.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for his statement. As for the first part of his statement, I can say, as I said to my colleague from Mexico, that there will of course be equality of information, but in a context where we work more in terms of years, so I ask you to give me one or two minutes so that I can give you a text that has some chance of being accepted. As for the second point raised by the Ambassador of Pakistan, if there is a consensus in the Conference to establish an ad hoc group on negative security assurances, then it certainly will not be the President who decides not to include this element in a programme of work, given that the agenda makes provision for it. Third, it is clear that the definition of the Conference on Disarmament is well known to us all here and derives from paragraph 120 of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

I give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): I am grateful for the clarification. I am not sure whether I understand precisely what you mean about sharing texts in some sort of sequential order with various delegations. I am sure you must have your reasons. But I would plead that, if there is to be transparency, it should be accompanied by equity, and we would not wish your process to be stalled because we have been treated unequally.

Second, with regard to the question of negative security assurances, I wonder why, if the text that you are proposing contains a proposal for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on a fissile material treaty - which we had previously established and whose mandate you do not propose to change - your text would not contain a proposal on negative security assurances, because it is exactly the same case. In fact, we were able to establish an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances at times when we were unable to establish an ad hoc committee on fissile material. Accordingly, should not your text also contain a fourth proposal, which relates to the establishment of an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances, following the same principle as that which you apply to the fissile material treaty? This is a question which I put to you, and I would be grateful for a response as to why the negative security assurances text is missing from your proposal.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for his statement. It is my belief that it is already quite ambitious, at this late stage in our session, to have a programme of work containing three elements. That said, I have nothing against including the negative security assurances and I shall certainly take due account of the remarks of the Ambassador of Pakistan.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, I do not wish to leave anybody with the wrong impression of the position of my delegation. I would be surprised - rudely surprised - if your proposals for a work programme did not include an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances, something to which there is no opposition. If this is excluded, my delegation will have to review its position on the other elements of the work programme. I just want to put this on the table for the sake of transparency and I do not see any reason why negative security assurances should be left out of your proposals.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I have taken note of that statement and I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, Ambassador Seibert.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): I should like to congratulate you on the assumption of your office, which, as you will by now have discovered, is not an easy one, and I wish to assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Having said this, Mr. President, we are also interested in transparency, but we do understand that you need a couple of days in order to contact delegations. With reference to the last statement by the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan, however, my understanding is that you are consulting on issues on which we do not yet have full consensus. On other issues there has been no objection, so, if you are consulting on three issues, that does not mean that the Conference cannot also deal with other issues. We are ready any time to establish an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances. I have seen particular interest manifested in that. Perhaps we also may have a future Chairman for such a Committee, but we would have to discuss that at a later stage. Clearly we have had consensus on a number of other issues, including the Special Coordinators, and that of course should remain intact. What you are doing here is not replacing previous consensus, but adding some issues in which particular interest has been demonstrated by a large majority of delegations. In that sense, we fully support your effort.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Germany for the kind words addressed to the Chair and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, first of all, allow me to add my congratulations, too, on your assumption of the presidency at a very difficult time, as my distinguished colleague from Germany has noted.

Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

If the explanation for your dealing with the three issues is that which has been stated by the distinguished Ambassador of Germany, namely, that these are outstanding issues on which further consultations are required, I am prepared to accept that. That is the basis and that is how we should proceed, but on the understanding that, when we come to adopt a work programme as a whole, there will be other issues which have constituted part of the work programme. On that basis, I can go along with the process that you have in mind.

With regard to the chairmanship of the various ad hoc committees and working groups, I am very grateful to my distinguished colleague from Germany for having nominated me to become the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee - was it the fissile material Ad Hoc Committee?

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): Are there other delegations wishing to speak? I see none. The next plenary meeting will be held on Thursday, 14 June 2000, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.